A CALL TO ACTION

ADDRESS OF WILLIAM IRVINE TO THE FIRST ANNUAL CONVENTION OF C.C.F. CLUBS EDMONTON, JULY 14-15, 1936

THIS is the first convention of C.C.F. Clubs to be held in Alberta. I regard it as an historical event of great significance. This convention is proof that the philosophy of the Co-operative Commonwealth is permeating the body politic, and evidences also a movement toward organization among people who while of the masses, have not been part of the Labor or Farmer movements which hitherto composed the Federation.

Since the beginning of the present year it has been my work to organize the C.C.F. movement in this province. Such work it must be noted, has not only consisted of forming branches of the organization in towns and cities but also in stimulating and reorganizing the U.F.A. in rural areas.

My work was made possible by the personal monthly donations of friends of the C.C.F. throughout Alberta. On behalf of the movement I desire to thank those for their generosity and for their high sense of citizenship, and to express the hope that many more of our people will come to our financial assistance in this way so as to insure the continuance of the work.

The Problem

The economic problem of our time which accounts for the appearance of the C.C.F. movement may be summarized briefly. As a result of applied science we have achieved a producing capacity equal to or beyond our consuming capacity. But because of a shamelessly unjust and inefficient distribution millions are in want while wealth is wasted unused.

The private ownership of the means of wealth production, that is, natural resources, machines, solar power and finance, etc., is the basis upon which distribution takes place. Ownership of these means, determines the portion of the annual output of wealth which goes to the few owners and that which goes to the rest of the people. Only a very few own the means of wealth production. They claim the major portion of all wealth produced. They cannot consume such wealth themselves so they turn it into capital. In this way there is on the one hand a progressively increasing capacity to produce, while relatively on the other hand there is a progressively decreasing opportunity to consume.

The machine, the product of man's inventive genius and which should be common property, has made abundance possible, but being privately owned its products are also privately owned, those employed to run the machines having no legal claim to more than the stipulated wages and those who are unemployed, because of the machine, having no legal claim to any wealth at all.

We have arrived at a stage when this vast surplus alloted to capital through ownership has backed up and stopped the wheels of industry so that inefficiency and waste at the producing end is equalled only by want and misery so universally prevalent among consumers.

The Final Crisis

Capitalism is therefore moving swiftly toward the final crisis. Fight-

ing to the last for its privileges it finds Fascism and war to be advantageous allies and is adopting them.

Fascism, the final stage of capitalism in its national aspect, has become necessary to the continuance of the system because without the coercion it imposes, human nature would not submit to the deprivations which are unavoidable if the system is to be maintained.

In its international aspect capitalism resorts to war because a human disaster on so gigantic a scale affords a temporary outlet for surplus wealth which otherwise would be wasted without an equivalent in monetary profit. But war, in addition to the wholesale murdering of the young and vigorous who might otherwise obey the urge of life and rebel against the system, absorbs the population in the fear of an immediate death, excluding for a time the fear of a living death imposed by want.

The Reality of the Struggle

The modern struggle is therefore very real indeed. It is the age-long struggle for life and liberty which is being fought out amidst new conditions and on a different field.

We are now in the midst of the greatest and most vital crisis which history has so far known. So vital to the future of mankind is this present struggle that we will live more fully and more gloriously, even though we die immediately while fighting on the right side of this issue, than if we were to live the alloted span in a drab and hopeless existence.

Here is a chance for immortality for those who have been cruelly despised and rejected by an economic system based on greed and defended and maintained by methods more sordid and brutal than those in practice in the pre-historic jungle. I do not call you to the ranks of an ordinary political party. I call you as crusaders in the greatest struggle of history. Our purpose is emancipation from economic slavery. You who fill the ranks of this movement must be prepared for any degree of deprivation. You must hold to the purpose unswervingly regardless of immediate consequences.

This is a movement for the wise, the young, the fearless, for those whose capacity to endure can measure up to victory. But this I can say to comfort you. Our cause will and must triumph. But let us consider the worst possible outcome. If we should ultimately lose we shall have lost nothing in reality but a complacent servile slavery which we by actively joining the fight, will exchange for a militant indomitable courage. So even if we should meet defeat we will save the human spirit from the potters' field which in that event will entomb an inhuman civilization.

The Objective

Above all else we must keep our vision clear and our purpose firm. There must be no uncertainty about our objective, no wavering in our action.

Our objective is the abolition of unnecessary and inexcusable poverty. The issue is clear cut and obvious. It is capitalism or the Co-operative Commonwealth; profit for a few or abundance and life for all; private ownership of public property and billions for a few owners, with want and constant insecurity for the many, or collective ownership and economic security for everyone. This is the issue, and our ranks are open to enlist everyone who is oppressed and who stands to gain by the abolition of poverty.

No "Middle Way"

There is no middle-of-the-road position tenable in the present situation. We are either for the Co-operative Commonwealth or against it. Those who may try to fight on both sides of the issue will be crushed in the middle. The reward of victory for those of the dispossessed who assist capitalism to survive will be penury and the status of a slave. It is better to starve in a struggle for life and liberty than to starve as a mute slave who never knew the thrill which comes from courage to fight for real freedom. Let Canadians therefore take their stand against capitalism and for the Co-operative Commonwealth.

The C.C.F. has taken its stand definitely for the Co-operative Commonwealth. On this issue its stand is to the left. So far as the attainment of the objective of the movement is concerned, namely, the abolition of poverty, the C.C.F. is so far to the

left that there is no left left to the left of us.

We are going all the way.

United Front

This leads naturally to an observation on the popular cry for a United Front. There is obviously no place for two political parties on the Socialist side of the present issue. There are, of course, several parties on the capitalist's side, but they divide that they might rule, while our division means defeat. Liberals, Conservatives and Social Credit all stand as one when capitalism is challenged. This apparent division is part of the capitalistic technique of retaining power.

There is only one possible way in which we can be defeated ultimately and that is by division in the ranks of those who are the victims of the present system. As long as we are busy fighting each other, capitalism is secure and continued economic injustice is certain.

I think it is true to say that the chief difference between Socialists and Communists has been one of tactics rather than in objective. May I humbly suggest to both sides that it is very bad tactics to decide your tactics too far in advance. It is even worse tactics to decide tactics on the basis of doctrinaire belief, when they should be decided on the basis of all the facts in a given situation. It would be better to decide the tactics when the situation arrives and all its factors are known. Further may I observe that it seems absurd to me that two factions should fight over how a thing is to be done in the future when the right to do the thing at all depends upon our ability to stand together in the present.

Unity cannot come to our ranks in the manner in which it has been attempted up to the present. And it is hardly reasonable to assume that the failure to find unity is all due to one side. All that I wish to say on this question here is that even if it should prove impracticable to unite in one organization surely arrangements can be made in the future whereby we may assist each other in a crisis which may threaten the life and liberty of us all, or during an election, in particular ridings, between which co-operative arrangements might be made. Surely if it is a case of electing a capitalist supporter or a Communist, we would rather elect a Communist.

Speeches on unity and doctrinaire arguments will only serve to widen the breach. If the people are left to their own choice they will unite. If leaders disagree and separate, factions will be created and the movement split. A movement split is a movement defeated. I ask you all to think of our common objective and save your powder and shot for your real enemies.

If left and right wings would work together as they do on any sensible bird, we might be able to fly. But when the one tries to destroy the other, progress ends. A bird with one wing can only make a circle and it does not much matter whether with a left wing it makes a circle to the right, or with a right wing it makes a circle to the left. It takes both wings to get anywhere.

Emotional Reaction

Post-election psychology is seldom a favorable soil in which to plant the seeds of a radical movement. Elections are invariably followed by a lethargic reaction equal and opposite to that emotional hysteria characteristic of humanity in mass action. The elections of last year were much more hysterical than usual owing to the actual want and suffering of the people, which had been severe and prolonged. People had become impatient with and rebellious against governments in power which had either tried and failed or failed to try. On the other hand there were very definite and lucrative promises made by the successful political parties. Those promises were so attractive and the need for their fulfilment so great that the mere wish to have them implemented became a substitute for reason and common sense. People were rallied through sheer emotion to the support of the promise-makers. Reason was forbidden. Leaders actually warned the people against listening to other views.

The reaction to the strain of the election of last year, a reaction hastened by deep disappointment with the performance of the promising govern-

ments, is as marked as the emotional display it sought to balance. Reactions of this sort follow all our elections to a greater or lesser degree. Their manifestations vary according to the peculiarities of the individuals.

On the part of some there is a tendency toward discouragement. They become disgruntled and adopt a "what's the use" attitude.

Many on the winning side of the election but who, not knowing it, are still on the losing side of economics, feel that they have "done their bit," that there is nothing more to be done. They are the credulous souls who patiently await a harvest that they will reap but who while looking on the barren fields will refuse to believe that they have been duped until December when all hope of any harvest is buried feet deep in winter snow.

Then there are the "wait and see" people who, it must be said, are reasonable in a way. They may not have expected much from the new governments and would probably be surprised if results of value materialized; still they say, "Let's be fair, let's give them a chance so that when we do turn against them there may be no doubt of our justification in doing so."

But there are also those whose vision remained undimmed by reverse. My work so far has been directed chiefly to the reforming of their scattered ranks. They see the movement historically as well as in the daily events in the process of its development. The value of history for them does not consist of ape-like repetition, but in history's creativeness. They see in history, past and present, the budding of new creations which will find their fruition in the tomorrow. As such they recognize the Co-operative Commonwealth as a new era just born in the imagination of our time. They have seen it as necessity's child, they have discerned its potentialities and realize that its growth and education are processes through which it must pass to maturity and its ultimate objective. Moreover, they know that their efforts and devotion are constantly necessary to its nurture and development.

An Analogy

I cannot refrain from drawing attention here to the striking analogies existing between a new-born movement and a new-born child. I point these out because if they are seen by us we shall be more patient, more considerate and more hopeful in our work. You will pardon me if I make a few comparisons in this connection. I make them because of their pertinence to certain occurrences in the youthful antics of our movement which have disturbed some of us to a degree far beyond their importance.

Every child may be a new creation but it is also in a sense a composite of all past generations. It will inherit both strengths and weaknesses that may have to be supplanted by habits more essential to its own life. Similarly a new movement while a new creation is not and cannot be created out of nothing. It reaches back far into the past. It too is a composite of all previous efforts. It too inherits strengths and weaknesses, some of which must be dropped. Shall we not have as much patience with our new movement in supplanting its inherited weaknesses with new and lifeward habits, as we have with children in a similar position?

Then a child seems to be subject to many troublesome diseases. These diseases appear to be very difficult to avoid; they are not usually fatal, however, or few of us would be here. Measles, mumps and scarlet fever are very common diseases among children but seldom attack adults.

Young movements get their child diseases, too. They come out in rashes or manifest themselves in brief acute internal disruptions that are seldom fatal and must be treated for what they are, diseases of childhood and youth. For instance, it is a characteristic of a new movement to tear itself apart in an effort to insure its unity.

Another common disease of a young movement is to become prostrate over how it is going to do something that it is not yet called upon to do, to such an extent that it stops doing the thing that should and must be done immediately. These are the measles and mumps of childhood. We shall grow out of these things.

One other observation in this connection. A child does not learn to walk or reach its full development in a day. Its first effort at walking is

an apparently meaningless kicking of the legs; next it crawls about, then stands up by a chair but falls and cries. Again it takes courage and presently it is standing alone, but again falls and cries bitterly. By and by we find it taking its first step or two, but once again it falls and gets hurt. But after these repeated failures the mother does not pick it up and say, "Now, didn't I tell you you couldn't walk? You have tried three times and failed. Now go and lie flat on your back all the rest of your life or until such time as you can walk without falling." No; that mother knows that only by continued and persistent courageous effort will that child ever be able to walk.

Let those who are discouraged by failure to win an immediate victory take heart and realize that a new era does not develop in a year. First efforts, although apparent failures, are not so; they are on the contrary partial successes, each effort preparatory to a greater yet to follow until a series of such efforts brings us to the achievement of the desired end.

The new social order—the Co-operative Commonwealth—as yet is just born. But it is clear that if the race is to continue the Co-operative Commonwealth is destined to succeed. The great events, the natural forces which make history are on our side. The innate desire for survival itself will ultimately compel us to abandon the musty tomb of a dead era and to emerge into the light and life-giving warmth of the economic freedom of the new.

Will Try Again

The relentless economic pressure has not relaxed as a result of last year's elections; emotional phenomena will pass just as they came; the people in their day-to-day struggle will return again to sanity and thought, and will be ready to be led forward to victories less disappointing.

The masses of the people of this province voted for Social Credit. Driven by economic pressure, confronted with the helplessness of governments to assist them and having been assured of immediate rewards, they sincerely turned into, what seemed to them to be, a new path. If, as is only too likely, that path should prove to be but a rough and almost impassable detour back to the same old road; or if they have been misled, they will be ripe for action when the time of disillusionment comes. These people thought they were being led into a new social order by a short cut. Who can blame them for taking it? If that new order does not materialize these same people will try again. It is our task to show them that the path we are on leads to where they really wanted to go, and we should be ready then to lead a great mass movement for the establishment of Socialism.

Lessons

There are two significant things to be noted from the last general election in this province. One is that when economic conditions become increasingly difficult people will act. They may not act in a manner which will be to their own benefit, in fact they are even more likely to act in a manner which will increase their difficulties, if for no other reason than that there are many wrong ways but only one right way of solving a problem. But of one thing we may be certain: when economic pressure threatens life, people will act. This fact makes it all the more imperative that we should know in advance how to act, so that improvement rather than the reverse should be the result.

The other feature of importance is that fear, anger, hate or good-will, in short, emotions, are the vehicles of mass action rather than reasoned knowledge. The average man is not a potential professor of economics but he may be counted on to respond quickly to a sense of economic danger. Therefore, no matter how well informed or scientific our democratic leadership may be, and it cannot be too much so, it must not become so intellectually detached from the realities of the common experience as to lose its appeal to the masses. The original program of the C.C.F. is a splendid example of that sort of thing. That program was as sound, as impregnable, and as magnificent as the Rock of Gibraltar but quite as useless. The Rock of Gibraltar could sink ships and win victories if the enemy fleet were foolishly steered within range, or to pass through the narrow strait, but the Rock cannot move from its

base, so is of less value in a modern war than the smallest craft in the "mosquito fleet."

An Effective Program

An effective program must reach the people where they are living. Let the program be sound, let it be honest, let it be fundamental and far-reaching, but let it reach the people. Since under democracy a program, no matter how good, cannot even be tried unless the people understand it, the first duty of leadership is to provide an understandable program, one that answers the cry of need.

Election programs should not contain more than one idea and that idea should be both soundly related to Socialistic philosophy and vitally connected with the immediate problem of the people.

Secret of Organization

The cornerstone of any organization must be a simple, desirable objective. People cannot achieve anything by collective action unless they are organized. They will not organize unless they can know and see what they are to gain by such organization. An organization cannot be built at all unless it has something to do, and when built it cannot continue to exist after the job has been done. An organization must have something vital to do.

The central idea of the C.C.F. is the abolition of poverty and the attaining of economic security for all. That is the objective. With that idea as a basis you can launch into all the economic intricacies which may be necessary or desirable. But people who may take no interest in such details, who may never understand the economic reasons of their poverty, who may have neither inclination nor capacity to follow finely spun threads of abstract theorizing, may nevertheless vote against poverty gladly and in doing so can be as effective in giving scientific Socialism a chance to reach its objective as if they were experts in economic analyses.

The masses of the people of this generation, like others before them, have lived under capitalism ever since they were born, but may not, and probably do not, know the inner workings of the economic system. And there will probably be many who, a generation after the introduction of Socialism, will not know the finer points of that system's operation. So in our propaganda we must be careful not to make a fetish of doctrine. People desire a fuller life whether they know what life is or not. Our appeal must be to their hearts as well as to their reasoning facilities, immediate as well as remote.

While it is true that we must have navigators who can guide our ship across a trackless sea, it is not necessary that every sailor should have a master's ticket. The port at the end of the voyage is the centre of interest.

C.C.F. Provincial

Our first objective is to attain power. The first step in that direction is organization. Our work in this connection has been somewhat retarded owing to confusion arising out of the idea of federation. The U.F.A. and the Labor parties were the original members of the C.C.F. movement in this province. Both agreed upon a common federal program as a basis upon which to seek political power. Provincially, however, the Federation idea was dropped. The U.F.A. and Labor faced the electorate on different programs. In short, the organizations which were C.C.F. in the federal were not C.C.F. provincially. Misunderstandings and confusions arising from this stupid position was no small factor in the resultant defeat of both groups. And having been thus defeated in the provincial election, the way had been paved for defeat in the federal also where the contest was staged on a C.C.F. basis.

The very first task of the C.C.F. in Alberta is to clear up this impossible situation. There are two ways in which that may be done. The first way would be to organize the people of Alberta, agrarian and urban alike, into a Commonwealth or people's party or straight Socialist party, while retaining the original objective of the Federation. There are many people both of the rural and urban populations who are urging this course. But there are difficulties in the way of this suggestion which if we do not heed at this stage will probably lead to greater difficulties in the future than we now have.

It will be clear to all, I am sure, that there can be no political victory

for the Co-operative Commonwealth in this province without the support of the rural population. The U.F.A. is the only farmers' organization that can speak with any authority for the farmers. We must concede the right to that organization to use its political power as it sees fit. Up to the time of the last annual convention of the U.F.A. that body adhered to the maintaining of one organization for action both in the economic and political fields, and refused to become a mere political party or to yield its autonomy to any other body whatsoever. In other words, it stood firm for the Federation. Now this question is one which the U.F.A., the strongest member of the C.C.F., must settle for itself without advice from other units in the Federation.

At the last annual convention of the U.F.A. this matter was discussed at great length. The opinion appears to be growing among the farmers that the U.F.A. should confine its activities to its industrial problems and to co-operative buying and selling and to build up the C.C.F. as the sole instrument of political action. Should this course be taken at a subsequent convention of that body the confusion between provincial and federal political action would disappear; it would then devolve upon the C.C.F. to organize units throughout the rural as well as urban communities. If, however, the U.F.A. remains as a unit in the Federation the work of organizing would be greatly simplified, but the confusion would remain unless the U.F.A. were to decide to take provincial political action on the same basis as federal action is taken, namely C.C.F.

This is the second and only other possible way to end the confusion to which I invited your attention a few moments ago. That is to have a C.C.F. provincial program of political action. On this suggestion this convention is free to take action on its own behalf, subject to the concurrence of other affiliated units. I hope that a suitable motion to this effect will be presented and passed by this convention and the necessary steps taken toward preparing a C.C.F. provincial program in co-operation with other units of the Federation. If in the meantime the U.F.A. should take the first suggested course, the necessity for such a program would still remain.

Organization Just Begun

Our organization work has just begun. This convention should give a great impetus to organization work. Every delegate here should become an organizer in his or her own vicinity. Do a little missionary work in the districts adjacent to your own. Let our next convention be the greatest of its kind ever held in the province of Alberta.

An Appeal

I appeal to you to make this convention and this movement as worthy and creditable as the merits of the cause which we espouse. Our movement will be judged in large measure by the tolerance and wisdom which we display in our deliberations. If we have personal grievances or prejudices, let's leave that out and permit our branch of the C.C.F. movement to be born in the true spirit of tolerance and solidarity.

I invite you to help abolish poverty in Canada; to maintain and if possible extend the personal liberties we have attained; and to be a defence against our country being involved in the next great world war which is now in the making. Poverty can be abolished by socializing the means by which the people are now exploited. We can protect ourselves against Fascism and war and gain economic security by uniting ourselves in one great mass movement under the C.C.F. and thereby attaining the necessary power to effect the fundamental changes in our economic system.

Power is the first objective. We know what should and must be done; what we need is power to do it. We have the power, too, if we will only engine with leaky flues. It burns any bickerings remind me of an old steam engine ith leaky flues. It burns any amount of coal, uses plenty of water, but can only raise enough steam to blow the whistle. All the energy leaked out through leaking flues. Let us confine our collective power into one great cylinder of common purpose and thus conserve and use our power intelligently.

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